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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA349, NICARAGUA CIVIL SOCIETY: STRUGGLING TO KEEP

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA349	2008-03-25 23:00	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758468.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
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<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
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<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1243
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 5113
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 MANAGUA 000349

SIPDIS

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DEPT: PLEASE PASS TO USAID-BONICELLI
DEPT. FOR WHA/CEN NYMAN AND GREENE
DEPT. ALSO FOR DRL MAGGIO
DEPT. ALSO FOR USOAS
NSC FOR VALVARADO
SOUTHCOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2018
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUA CIVIL SOCIETY: STRUGGLING TO KEEP
DEMOCRATIC SPACES OPEN

REF: A. 08 MANAGUA 130
[1](#)B. 07 MANAGUA 2135
[1](#)C. 07 MANAGUA 1730
[1](#)D. 07 MANAGUA 964

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) Nicaraguan civil society actors have expressed growing concern about the anti-democratic tendencies of the Ortega government, frustration with the political class, the private sector, and the lack of a coherent political opposition. They are also convinced that civil society is the only viable tool to counter the Ortega Administration's efforts to perpetuate its grip on power. Most groups share a common view on issues such as opposition to the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs), the importance of mobilizing citizen participation ahead of the 2008 municipal elections, the challenges of competing for donor resources, and a sense of despair about the future. However, their organizations lack a coherent vision on such basic issues as whether to work together as a single coalition versus operating independently. Our efforts to engage with these diverse organizations and individuals outside the usual political party channels were well received and revealed a strong desire for more regular dialogue and exchange with the Embassy, if only to provide, as one civic leader noted, a form of "therapy."

[1](#)2. (SBU) This is the first of a two-part series of cables on civil society organizations currently active in Nicaragua. This report will focus on their perceptions of the current political situation and their role as an opposition force defending democratic reform. The second cable will focus on the challenges these organizations face in working together as a coalition of the opposition. A short directory of the NGOs appears in para 13. END SUMMARY

Democracy vs. Authoritarianism

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[1](#)2. (C) We have conducted an extensive outreach campaign with

twelve different organizations representing youth, women's associations, human rights activists, and democracy promoters across the ideological spectrum. A number of these organizations are, or have been, recipients of USG assistance. Participants were frank, and angry about the direction of country under Ortega. Despite their ideological and personal differences, the leaders of these groups are unified in the belief that they must work together to defend democracy, stop the slide toward authoritarianism, and oppose the centralization of power in the hands of the president and his wife, Rosario Murillo, which they perceive is well underway.

13. (C) NGO leaders fret that the Ortega government has already begun to close the democratic spaces that many of them had been fighting to pry open for the past 17 years. In their view, Nicaraguans have become disenchanted with the traditional political class which has perpetuated historic "caudillo" pattern by replacing a corrupt leader on the right with a corrupt leader on the left. All alluded to the political "Pacto" power-sharing agreement between former President Arnoldo Aleman of the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) and Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) as the primary source of political corruption within the party system, the judiciary, and the National Assembly. Summing up a typical view of the main difference between the two political sides, Maria Jose Zamora, Vice President of the center-right NGO Hagamos Democracia, mused that "the right isn't good for anything," and the left won't let anything, "even the death of one's mother," stand in its way. While they regard the Liberals on the right as being fragmented (despite the current electoral unity agreement), the FSLN is considered more organized and disciplined but "has no respect

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for the rule of law."

14. (C) Another key concern, as representatives of the election-oriented NGO Etica y Transparencia and the independent youth-oriented Juventud para la Democracia de Nicaragua (JUDENIC) emphasized, is the ongoing corruption of the judicial system and the fate of the eight seats on the Supreme Court Justice that will be opening this year. They warned that the next composition of the highest court could further entrench the "Pacto" with implications for deal-making in the November 2008 municipal elections. The municipal elections will be a major milestone in determining the direction of the country; thus many of these NGOs are anxious to play a role in getting out the vote, increasing citizen participation, educating the people about their civic duty, and countering a sense of apathy and resignation they fear is underway.

NGOs Regard Government Scrutiny and CPCs as Bad Omen

15. (C) Our contacts argued that civil society is the only sector consistently and vocally opposing the Ortega's government and therefore bears the brunt of government pressure and "retaliation." Several organizations complained that the FSLN is attempting to infiltrate civil society NGOs to foment internal dissent, fragmentation, and mistrust. Everyone we met reported experiencing some form of government harassment, intimidation, or hostility. One organization termed the government's sudden efforts to audit and impose tax fines on NGOs critical of the government as a form of "financial terrorism." The financially-strapped JUDENIC was intimidated into paying government fines, even though it was up to date on its taxes, rather than incur the legal costs of fighting and risk further legal problems.

16. (SBU) Some groups, such as the Women's Network Against Violence (WNAV), comprised of 100 organizations around the country, have been completely shut out by the government. Although all previous governments had worked with the Women's Network--even if on sometimes confrontational grounds --

under Ortega, the government has severed its contact entirely. The Ministry of the Family recently decreed an end to all coordination with the WNAV and indicated that it would instead be working with the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) (Ref. A).

17. (SBU) Although the CPCs were not officially launched until November 30, a number of civil society organizations have adamantly opposed them since first announced by President Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo a year ago (Ref. B). Our contacts aired concerns that as the CPCs become more entrenched, Nicaraguan NGOs will be increasingly excluded from major social programs such as "Zero Hunger" and "Zero Usury." (NOTE: A more detailed assessment of the impact CPCs are having on civil society actions will be provided septel. END NOTE.)

Private Sector, International Cooperation: Whose Side Are They On?

18. (SBU) While most of our contacts' ire was directed at the government and the traditional political parties, civil society actors are also increasingly frustrated by the lack of support from the country's business class and with the difficulty they have in accessing international funding. Some were mystified that international donors were not trying to do more to strengthen civil society given the current political climate. With even greater disdain, they judged the business class as lacking the "courage" to support civil society out of fear of political retribution.

19. (C) Although they stressed that support for civil society was now of "utmost importance," several of our contacts complained that the conditions for accessing development assistance and working with the donor community are too

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inflexible and bureaucratic. A representative of JUDENIC suggested that the donor community is too entangled in promoting their own strategies and do not "really listen to the Nicaraguans." They also warned that assistance to government organizations or "government-friendly" NGOs only plays right into the hands of Ortega and serves to legitimize his regime. They are often discouraged by the strings attached to certain forms of assistance, which they view as "interference" in their ability to do their work.

110. (C) Organizations on the left are particularly discouraged by the types of USG and international development assistance available to NGOs. One representative found it ironic that Ortega was accusing them of being "puppets of the empire," when actually their organizations had not received any U.S. financial assistance, nor did they understand how it was awarded. Georgina Munoz, Director of the left-of-center Civil Coordinator's Office, asserted that the international community is not doing enough to defend civil society and is in effect turning a blind eye to the government's attempts to block cooperation with NGOs. Sofia Montenegro, a former Sandinista, journalist, and Director of the Women's Autonomous Movement (MAM) (Ref D), admonished the international community for allegedly maintaining a neutral stance in what she insists is a clear choice: either democracy or authoritarianism. Others complained that international assistance, including that from the USG, was too bureaucratic, slow, and inflexible.

COMMENT
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111. (C) Every organization consulted -- left right, and center -- asserted that civil society is the only true opposition force capable of mobilizing people, encouraging citizen participation, advancing electoral reform, and defending citizen rights and democracy. While they all share a common goal of preserving democracy and stopping Ortega's

authoritarian perpetuation of power, they continue to struggle at forging on a common strategy and joint actions to advance these goals - thereby undermining their effectiveness. Based on the positive response we received from this outreach effort, we will continue to engage civil society groups and encourage them to work toward building an alliance to promote a spirit of cooperation and collaboration, and to avoid the potential of disintegration and disunity. We are encouraged by the fact that after this series of meetings, several representatives followed up with us requesting that we continue to hold a regular dialogue.

DIRECTORY OF NICARAGUAN DEMOCRACY NGOS

113. (U) Our program of outreach involved meeting with representatives of the following organizations:

1A. Movimiento por Nicaragua (Movement for Nicaragua--MpN)

Year established: 2004

Staff size and/or members: Permanent staff of 16. In 2005, MpN worked with a network of a 37 member organizations, but an unknown number of them are still active.

Political tendency: Started off as center-right, but MpN now also draws support from members of the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) Alliance.

Coverage: National, with seven departmental chapters.

Main Issues: Strengthen democratic institutions, legal analysis, citizen participation and rights, and voter education; provide training in democratic values, and facilitate civil registry and issuance of national identification cards (cedulas) to marginalized groups.

website: www.mpn.org.ni

1B. Hagamos Democracia (Let's Make Democracy Happen)

Year established: 1995

Staff size and/or members: Permanent staff of 7, with approximately 150 volunteers, mainly active during election season and/or for certain projects.

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Political tendency: Center-right

Coverage: National

Main Issues: Serve as National Assembly watchdog; promote citizen participation, transparency, civic and democratic culture; and strengthen civil society.

website: www.hagamosdemocracia.org.ni

1C. Etica y Transparencia (Ethics and Transparency--EyT)

Year established: 1996

Staff size and/or members: Permanent staff includes 174 coordinators (153 municipal, 17 departmental, 4 in the Managua district), plus an extensive network of volunteers throughout the country. For the 2006 elections, EyT mobilized approximately 10,000 volunteer observers, and is seeking to mobilize at least 5,000 for the municipal elections in November 2008.

Political tendency: Center-right leaning but board members and coordinators cover the political spectrum.

Coverage: National

Main Issues: Conduct electoral observation, and promote transparency and anti-corruption.

website: www.eyt.org.ni

1D. Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres (Women's Autonomous Movement--MAM)

Year established: Formally established in 2006, but began to organize in the late 1980s

Staff size and/or membership: Permanent staff of five, plus 84 women leader who serve as members at the departmental level. Another 22 women and youth organizations are also members of MAM.

Political tendency: Left-leaning largely affiliated with the MRS.

Coverage: National

Main Issues: Social and political movement to promote gender

equality and women's rights; oppose patriarchal authoritarianism in political, economic, and social sectors; and defend the rule of law.

website: www.movimientoaautonomodemujeres.org

¶E. Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (Women's Network Against Violence)

Year established: 1993

Staff size and/or membership: Ten permanent representatives with network of over 190 individuals and organizations.

Political tendency: Center-left, but members come from broad spectrum

Coverage: National

Main Issues: Raise awareness of gender-based violence and women's rights; strengthen prevention of violence against women, assist victims and provide legal advocacy, conduct workshops, and provide shelters and protection for battered and abused women.

website: www.redmecnica.org.ni

¶F. Coordinadora Civil (Civil Coordinator)

Year established: 1993

Number of members: Umbrella organization of 20 NGOs and networks nationwide

Political tendency: Left-leaning, originally aligned with the FSLN, but now openly critical of the government.

Coverage: National

Main Issues: Coordinate and build consensus among NGOs; promote sustainable development, defend citizen rights, and strengthen civil society participation in public policy.

website: www.ccer.org

¶G. Federacion de ONGs (Federation of NGOs)

Year founded: 1989

Staff size and/or membership: Permanent staff of 8, plus 2 non permanent contractors, 6 volunteers, and 32 member organizations.

Political tendency: Non-political, but leans left.

Coverage: National

Main Issues: Coordinate actions among different NGOs to promote and strengthen Nicaragua's social and economic development, and ensure the needs of the people are

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incorporated into the planning and implementation of development decisions. Help member organizations gain access to financial resources.

¶H. Juventud por la Democracia de Nicaragua (Youth for the Democracy of Nicaragua--JUDENIC)

Year established: 2004

Staff size and/or membership: Permanent staff of 3, with 700 volunteers and members that are active during election periods.

Political tendency: Centrist

Coverage: National, presence in 6 departments

Main Issues: To promote democratic principles among youth, encourage youth citizen participation, support efforts to provide citizen identification cards (cedula).

website: www.judenic.org.ni

¶I. Comision Permanente de Derechos Humanos (Permanent Commission for Human Rights--CPDH)

Year established: 1977

Staff size and/or membership: Permanent staff of 44, plus 168 other members and volunteers

Political tendency: Independent, but leans right-of-center.

Coverage: National

Main Issues: To defend the rule of law; promote, protect, and defend human rights; serve as human rights watch dog.

www.cpdh.org.ni

¶J. Centro Nicaraguense de Derechos Humanos (Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights--CENIDH)

Year established: 1990

Staff size and/or membership: Permanent staff of 38, plus 71

commissions with over 1200 volunteers who serve as human rights promoters.

Political tendency: Independent, but leans left and is critical of current government.

Coverage: National

Main Issues: Promote, protect, and defend human rights, advise on human rights issues in legislation, provide training and awareness on human rights issues, and serve as human rights watch dog.

website: www.cenidh.org.ni

¶K. Consejo de Mujeres del Occidente (Western Women's Council)

Year established: 2005

Number of members: Over 220 women are registered members of the organization, headed by one director and one technical secretary.

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Political tendency: Independent

Coverage: North-Western Departments (Leon and Chinandega)

Main Issues: Promote women's economic empowerment, increase women's economic participation and role in development.

¶L. Centro para la Educacion y Prevencion del SIDA (Center for AIDS Education and Prevention--CEPRESI)

Year established: 1993

Staff size or membership: Approximately 80

Political tendency: Centrist, independent

Coverage: Active in six departments

Main Issues: Conduct HIV/AIDS education and prevention; promote human rights, raise political awareness of HIV/AIDs, sexual health, and sexual and reproductive rights.

website:www.cepresi.org.ni

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